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Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001

Alfred Session
June 21, 2001

CANADIAN RURAL PARTNERSHIP
RURAL DIALOGUE

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**Ontario
Rural Dialogue 2001**

**Alfred Session
June 21, 2001**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the contributions made by the rural citizens of Alfred and the surrounding area who participated in the Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001. Their thoughtful discussions and insights made it possible to identify the rural assets most valued by rural Ontario Francophones and the strategies that should be adopted to sustain those assets. Our thanks go to the local coordinators and the local steering committee members for bringing together a diverse group of participants and for planning a successful dialogue session. Thanks are also due to Collège d'Alfred for making facilities available to the session, to the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute for the overall coordination of the dialogue sessions, and to L'Art du Développement, PEOPLEnergy and the local facilitators for facilitating the session. The session would not have been possible without the generous funding provided by Human Resources Development Canada, Health Canada, the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario and Public Works and Government Services Canada. Our sincere appreciation for their generosity.

The Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 is an initiative of the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and Rural Team-Ontario. The partners in the endeavour were the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs; The Ontario Rural Council; and the University of Guelph. A heartfelt thanks to our partners.

FOREWORD

A total of six Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 sessions were held — in Kemptville (eastern Ontario), Alfred (Francophone), Ridgetown (southwestern Ontario), Guelph (central Ontario), New Liskeard (northeastern Ontario), and Emo (northwestern Ontario) — during June and July 2001.

This document is a record of discussions that took place at the Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 sessions in Alfred on June 21, 2001. Many of the discussions took place in brainstorming sessions at which no limits were placed on the participants. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Participant recommendations contained in this report are recorded as they were heard. We thank session participants for their comments.

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Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001

Alfred Session

Executive Summary

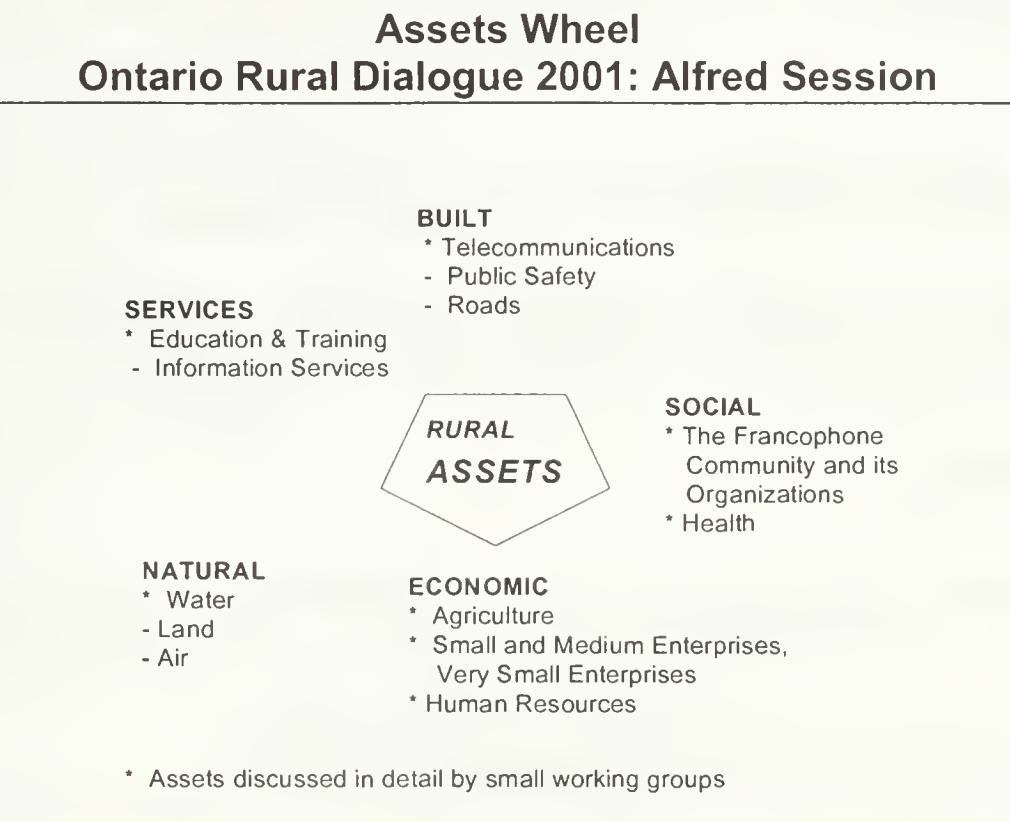
Introduction

The second of six Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 sessions was held in Eastern Ontario as a Francophone session. A group of fifty rural residents from Northern and Eastern Ontario representing a variety of age groups, interests and occupational categories met in Alfred on June 21, 2001 to discuss positive perspectives on rural values and priorities as part of the Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 process.

The Assets Approach to Valuing Rural Ontario

An **assets-based approach** was used to enable participants to focus on the strengths and resources of rural and remote communities and to identify threats to these assets. Participants then discussed positive strategies for citizen and government action to sustain key assets.

Participants identified and defined the key rural assets within **five asset bundles — built (infrastructure), social, economic, natural, and services**. The following diagram identifies the key rural assets in each asset bundle.



Through a discussion and voting process, the Francophone participants identified the rural assets they value most: **water, health, the Francophone community and its organizations, education and training, agriculture, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), micro-enterprises (M-Es), human resources, and telecommunications** (topic discussed along with “economy”).

Participant Recommendations

After meeting in focus groups, participants came together to present strategies that could utilize resources and mitigate threats to sustain the identified assets. By vote, the group identified the following strategies as most significant:

Citizen Strategies

Water:

- Require inspection of septic tanks and offer tax initiative to improve septic systems
- Lobby governments (provincial and federal) to take tax and legislative responsibility for water issues

The Francophone Community, Its Organizations and Health:

- French-language services should be available at all times
- Promote Francophone pride and organize events with large numbers attending

Education and Training:

- Educate young people so that they play a greater role in rural areas
- Identify expectations and potential of communities and businesses; promote potential of Francophone community

Agriculture:

- Set up networks for marketing and information exchange
- Educate officials, politicians and media on agricultural realities

Economic: SMEs, Micro-Enterprises, Human Resources and Telecommunications

- Create a telecommunications cooperative: rural telecommunications network
- Develop and implement a strategy to maximize rural resources

Government Strategies

Water:

- Conserve water, adapt practices, optimal and sustainable management
- Links groups, schools and government to increase awareness and education programs

The Francophone Community, Its Organizations and Health:

- Support grassroots Francophone organizations and institutions
- Recognize the French fact, French language and culture, the Francophonie

Education and Training:

- Offer greater financial flexibility to implement citizen strategies
- Encourage greater dialogue between schools and workplaces

Agriculture:

- Set up and promote mentoring services for food-processing business owners
- Provide adequate financial support for farmers comparable to those in the U.S. and Europe

Economic: SMEs, Micro-Enterprises, Human Resources and Telecommunications

- Maximize government resources and adapt them to the rural environment
- Give tax credits for computer enterprises and organizations

Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001

Alfred Session

Date: June 21, 2001

Location: Collège d'Alfred

Introduction

The second of six Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 Sessions was held in Eastern Ontario as a Francophone session. A group of fifty rural residents representing a variety of age groups, interests and occupational categories met in Collège d'Alfred on June 21, 2001, to discuss positive perspectives on rural values and priorities as part of the Rural Dialogue process. A demographic profile of participants is presented in Appendix A. After identifying key rural assets (strengths), participants discussed the resources that sustain the assets and the threats that may affect them. They then identified citizen and government strategies to sustain the assets for the future.

Forty people completed the survey forms, while 34 more, unable to participate, filled out a written survey.

The Rural Dialogue Process

In 1998, the federal government launched the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP) to support community development by adopting new approaches and practices to respond to rural and remote development issues.

The Rural Dialogue, a key, citizen-engagement component of CRP, is an ongoing two-way discussion between the federal government and Canadians from rural and remote regions. The Dialogue helps the federal government understand local and regional challenges and opportunities, and it gives rural and remote citizens an opportunity to influence federal government decision making on policies and programs.

The Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 process was designed to continue this dialogue. It was led by Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and Rural Team-Ontario (RT-O), representing many federal departments and provincial ministries. Other partners in the process were the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA); The Ontario Rural Council (TORC); and the University of Guelph (UoG). Funding for the dialogue was provided by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), Health Canada (HC), the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario (FedNor), and Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC).

Overview of the Assets Approach

Assets are what we want to keep, build upon and sustain for future generations.

Assessing and measuring rural assets is a **positive way** of valuing what we have and want to keep in rural Canada. Using an assets approach allows us to generate a total picture of the features and characteristics of rural life that are most valued by rural citizens. The information acquired in this data-gathering approach identifies and affirms what we **all** think is important about rural life. It becomes vital information for political and strategic representation of the “rural.” Assets-building connects people to a common cause. It brings us together, focuses our attention, and points us in the same direction.

The assets approach is both positive and inclusive:

- Rural assets sustain livelihoods, in both rural **and** urban areas.
- Assets include both **public and private** goods.

Important areas for action have traditionally been identified through a needs-assessment process. This approach identifies “problems” – areas that need attention because something is wrong or missing. In contrast, the assets approach emphasizes positives to identify resources on which to build.

A commonly voiced concern about the assets approach is that it does not sufficiently acknowledge legitimate rural needs. This, however, is not the case. What appear as “needs” in the needs-assessment approach appear as “assets that are threatened” in the assets approach, or as resources that are not being utilized. (As an example, consider low levels of employment, which, in the assets approach, are considered to be an asset of a population available to work). Thus, the assets approach identifies “needs,” but it examines them in the context of the larger resource pool. This enables participants to recognize the value of all of the assets in rural areas and to identify strategies to sustain the most important assets, rather than to focus solely on the assets that appear to be most threatened at the time.

Assets are often measured by calculating the total value of goods and services produced in rural areas. Such assets are mathematical and can be expressed as gross domestic product (GDP). The assets approach adds the view of what is important about rural Canada from the perspective of the rural population, the people who live and work amid the rural assets themselves.

In summary, rural assets are those popularly recognized attributes of rural areas that are considered essential for the maintenance of livelihoods, both rural and urban, and vital to sustainability of the economy, society and the environment of rural Canada.

Rural Assets Ranking

The process of identifying assets is new to most people. Over the past 30 years, processes for determining priorities for action have emphasized identifying needs. The needs-assessment approach focuses on problems and negatives. The assets approach helps people focus on positives while including the total picture of both positives and negatives.

It takes time to adjust to this new way of thinking. To enable participants to work with this new method and to focus on positives, the valuing of identified assets occurred in several stages. For details of the process, see **“The Process of Valuing Assets in Rural Ontario”** (Appendix B).

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

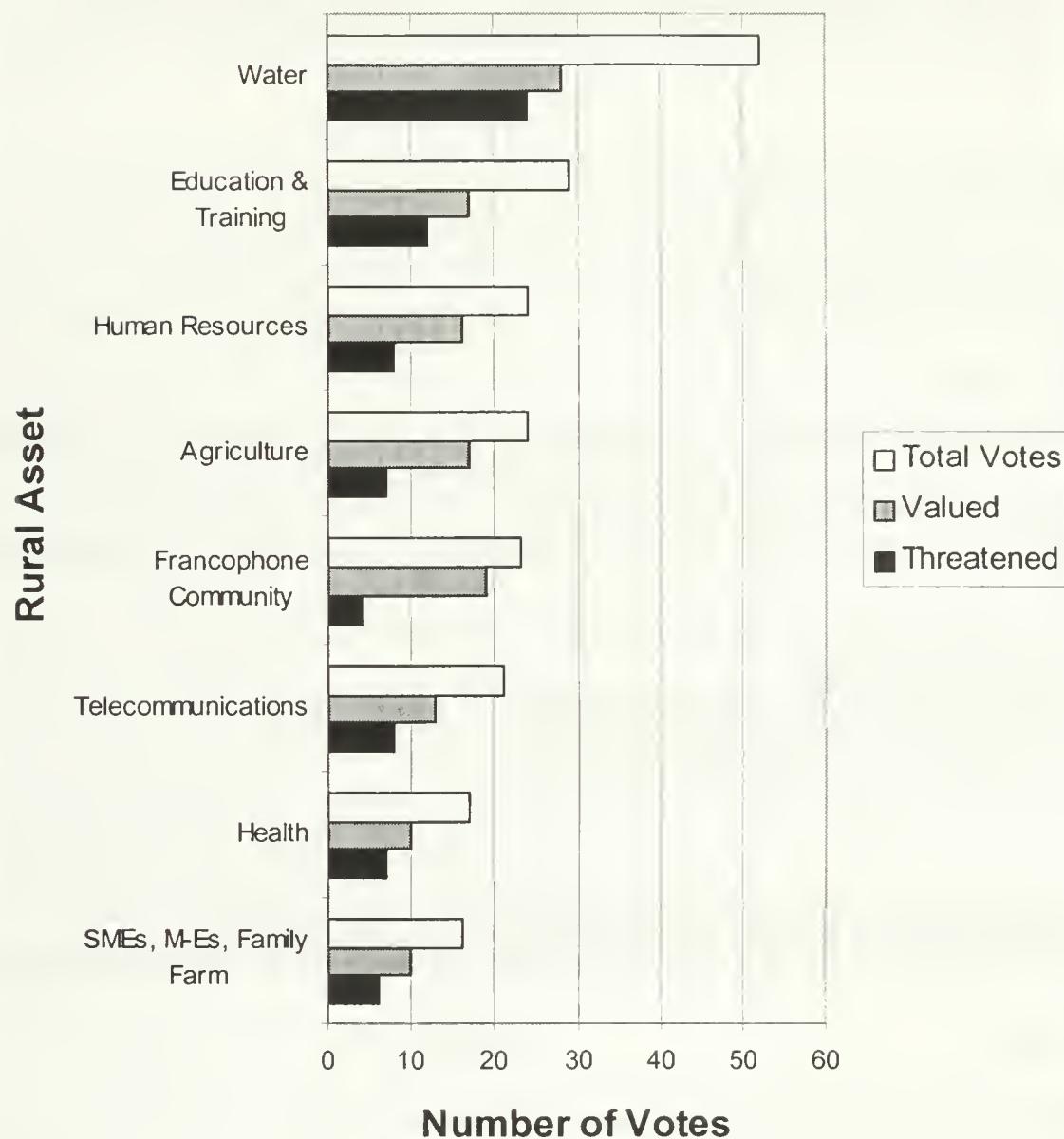
Over the course of the day, participants established in many ways the relative value of the assets they had identified. After the initial morning discussions, participants were asked to individually rank the assets on separate forms. Individual asset ranking percentages are reported under each key rural assets discussed by small working groups.

Because there is significant overlap in the definition of rural assets, they cannot be ranked precisely. For example, water and health, two commonly identified rural assets, are frequently cited in reference to the same issues. Therefore, it is a matter of judgement whether they should be considered one asset or two.

Large-group Rural Asset Ranking

Before the individual assets were ranked, participants undertook a large-group “asset voting” process, using blue and red dots (see Appendix C for results). This enabled them to consider the relative value of the assets they had identified and the extent to which they were valued (blue dots) or threatened (red dots). The following graph represents the top eight assets that were identified in the large-group asset voting process. It shows the total number of votes, as well as the breakdown of assets considered to be valued and threatened.

TOP EIGHT ASSETS IDENTIFIED AT ALFRED SESSION



Strategies for Sustaining Key Rural Assets

Citizen and government strategies developed by the Rural Dialogue participants for the key rural assets discussed in detail by small working groups are listed on the following pages. Individual and large group asset ranking, definitions for assets, resources sustaining the assets and threats to the assets identified by participants are found in Appendix D.

Water

Citizen Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for Francophone citizens:

- 1) Conserve water, change practices, practise sustainable management
- 2) Engage in educational and awareness programs in partnership with groups, schools and government

Other citizen strategies:

- Organize environment forum
- Install water meters
- Adopt new water conservation habits

Government Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for government action:

- 1) Require inspection of septic tanks; offer tax initiative to improve septic systems
- 2) Provincial and federal governments should take on fiscal and legislative responsibility for water

Other government strategies:

- Strengthen pesticide spraying regulations
- Invest in water control and management
- Initiate a rebate program for environmental protection

Health and the Francophone Community

Citizen Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for Francophone citizens:

- 1) Always ask for services in French
- 2) Promote Francophone pride
- 3) Organize events and participate in large numbers

Other citizen strategies:

- Maintain a strong network
- Promote our successes
- Share our community resources

Government Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for government action:

- 1) Support grassroots Francophone organizations and institutions
- 2) Recognize the French fact, French language and culture, the Francophonie

Other government strategies:

- Provide high-quality services in French rapidly and efficiently
- Provide financial support to community development

Education and Training

Citizen Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for Francophone citizens:

- 1) Educate youth so that they play a greater role in rural life
- 2) Identify expectations and potential of communities and businesses; promote the potential of the Francophone community

Other citizen strategies:

- Make better use of available accommodation
- Develop strategies to ensure reasonable remuneration in rural areas

Government Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for government action:

- 1) Introduce greater financial flexibility with respect to implementation of citizen strategies
- 2) Encourage greater dialogue between educational institutions and workplaces

Other government strategies:

- Grants for students who agree to return to rural areas
- Financial support to promote education and training programs in rural areas
- Support for development of an adequate transportation system for trainees and (later) employees
- Create school system based on language

Agriculture

Citizen Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for Francophone citizens:

- 1) Create marketing and information-sharing networks
- 2) Educate officials, politicians and media about farm realities

Other citizen strategies:

- Support development of youth leadership
- Develop local and national pride
- Create local purchasing and farmer support strategies
- Organize more agri-tourism events
- Create an environment conducive to active involvement by youth

Government Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for government action:

- 1) Establish and promote mentoring services for entrepreneurs engaged in processing farm products
- 2) Provide adequate financial support to farmers, comparable to that available to American and European farmers

Other government strategies:

- Create incentive for setting up farm or agri-food business
- Support research and studies related to setting up processing businesses
- Review standards; e.g., on raw milk
- Provide concrete support to farm technology transfer (acquisition of knowledge and practices)
- Support development of new farm or agri-food initiatives; e.g., goat cheese
- Support permanent and efficient employment services

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Micro-Enterprises (M-Es), Human Resources and Telecommunications

Citizen Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for Francophone citizens:

- 1) Set up a telecommunications cooperative – a rural telecommunications network
- 2) Develop and implement a strategy to maximize rural resources

Other citizen strategies:

- Create partnerships between businesses and schools

Government Strategies

Participants identified the following strategies as most significant for government action:

- 1) Maximize government resources and adapt them to the rural environment
- 2) Offer tax credit for computerization of businesses and organizations

Other government strategies:

- On-line access to business funding

Recommendations

As the day was ending, participants gathered to present the strategies recommended by the five focus groups. Participants then voted individually on what they believed to be the best three citizen and government strategies overall.

Citizen Strategies

Water:

- Require inspection of septic tanks and offer tax initiative to improve septic systems
- Lobby provincial and federal governments to take tax and legislative responsibility for water issues

The Francophone Community, Its Organizations and Health:

- Request that French-language services be available at all times
- Promote Francophone pride and organize events with large numbers attending

Education and Training:

- Educate young people so that they play a greater role in rural areas
- Identify expectations and potential of communities and businesses; promote potential of Francophone community

Agriculture:

- Set up networks for marketing and information exchange
- Educate officials, politicians and media on agricultural realities

Economic: SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications

- Create a telecommunications cooperative: rural telecommunications network
- Develop and implement a strategy to maximize rural resources

Government Strategies

Water:

- Conserve water, adapt practices, optimal and sustainable management
- Awareness and education programs through partnership of groups, schools and government

The Francophone Community, Its Organizations and Health:

- Support grassroots Francophone organizations and institutions
- Recognize the French fact, French language and culture, the Francophonie

Education and Training:

- Greater financial flexibility to implement citizen strategies
- Encourage greater dialogue between schools and workplaces

Agriculture:

- Set up and promote mentoring services for food-processing business owners
- Provide adequate financial support for farmers comparable to that available in the U.S. and Europe

Economic: SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications

- Maximize government resources and adapt them to the rural environment
- Give tax credit for computer enterprises and organizations

Common Themes

The following “resources” and “threats” for asset sustainability were identified in several of the working groups.

Resources

- government regulations and programs
- education and practical training
- partnerships between the private, community and public sectors
- the strength, pride and diversity of the Franco-Ontarian community
- laws, policies, programs
- bilingualism
- openness to globalization
- organizations and institutions such as Collège d'Alfred

Threats

- deregulation, transfer of responsibilities, budget cuts, reduced support from governments
- competition
- intergenerational continuity
- the two solitudes: urban and rural

Next Steps

The Ontario Rural Dialogue 2001 sessions took place in six regions across Ontario. Information from all sessions will be amalgamated and analysed in a comprehensive picture of the assets valued by citizens in rural Ontario. Results of this larger analysis and the information from the Ontario Regional Rural Conference 2001 held in North Bay, Ontario, August 26-28, 2001, will be incorporated into a final report.

The final report will reflect a comprehensive portrait of key rural assets in Ontario, along with the strategies recommended by conference participants.

Appendix A: Demographic Profile of Participants

The Rural Dialogue process is designed to represent all citizens living in rural Ontario. Enough demographic information was collected from participants to identify the diversity of participants and to pinpoint which ideas were expressed by specific groups, such as farmers and youth. The following numbers are based on the 40 completed profile forms returned by participants.

Demographic features of the Alfred session:

- ⇒ 37.5% of participants (15 of 40) were female
- ⇒ 17.5% of participants were in the 15–29 age group, 32.5% were aged 30–45, 47.5% were 46–64 and 2.5% were over 65
- ⇒ 22.5% of participants live on farms, 52.5% live in rural non-farm residences and 12.5% live in towns with a population under 25,000
- ⇒ 27% of participants have lived in their local area for at least 10 years
- ⇒ 35% of participants listed **government** as their primary or secondary occupation
- ⇒ 25% of participants listed **farming** as their primary or secondary occupation
- ⇒ 20% of participants listed **business or commerce** as their primary or secondary occupation
- ⇒ 20% of participants listed **education** as their primary or secondary occupation
- ⇒ 65% of participants reported total household income of over \$40,000

Overall, a diverse group of rural citizens participated in the Rural Dialogue in Alfred.

Appendix B: The Process of Valuing Assets in Rural Ontario

All the information presented by participants was gathered into a “data set,” which includes information both from and about the participants. Information from all six dialogue sessions will be amalgamated and analysed in a comprehensive picture of the assets valued by the citizens of rural Ontario.

- ⇒ **Participant Profile:** As part of the registration process, participants were asked to complete a two-page Participant Profile, which included demographic information. This information will be used to characterize the diversity of participants and to identify which ideas were expressed by specific groups, such as farmers and youth.
- ⇒ **Assets Wheel:** Participants created a comprehensive list of the key rural assets under five asset bundles: built (infrastructure), social, economic, natural, and services.
- ⇒ **Assets Voting:** Participants were given seven blue dots to indicate the assets they valued most, and three red dots to indicate the assets which they believed to be most threatened at this time. Asset Voting Results can be found in Appendix C.
- ⇒ **Comprehensive Overview of Key Assets:** The three assets with the most votes in each of the asset bundles were posted at the front of the room and discussed. This enabled participants to think about what other rural residents valued as rural assets.
- ⇒ **Assets Ranking:** Following the group discussion, participants were given a second opportunity to rank rural assets. Participants were asked to identify the five assets that they, as individuals, valued the most. These asset rankings were collected on individual sheets.
- ⇒ **Asset Working Groups:** Participants then broke into working groups to discuss the characteristics and issues surrounding a particular asset. Working group discussions were organized around the following:
 - ⇒ **Asset Definition**
 - ⇒ **Resources Sustaining the Asset**
 - ⇒ **Threats to the Asset**
 - ⇒ **Recommended Citizen Strategies for Sustaining the Asset**
 - ⇒ **Recommended Government Strategies for Sustaining the Asset**

Large-group Recommendations: As the day ended, each focus group presented its recommendations for citizens and government. All the participants voted on their top three citizen strategies and top three government strategies.

Appendix C: “Asset Voting” Results

During the morning session, participants were asked to identify, and then vote on, the rural assets they believed to be most important to rural lives. Participants were given seven blue dots to indicate the assets that they valued most, and an additional three red dots to indicate the assets they believed to be most threatened. The totals for all of the assets identified are listed below. The blue dot totals are listed first, separated by a comma from the red dot totals.

Built

Telecommunications – 13, 8
Public safety and security (police, fire, ambulance, 911, etc.) – 11, 4
Roads – 11, 3
Cooperatives – 5, 0
Small airports – 2, 0
Public buildings – 1, 0
Municipalities – 1, 1
Bridges, ferries, dams – 1, 0
Policies – 1, 0
Hydro towers, delivery services – 0, 0
Railways – 0, 0
Marinas – 0, 0

Economic

Agriculture and farms – 17, 7
Human resources – 16, 8
SMEs, M-Es and family businesses – 10, 6
Tourism – 5, 0
Subsidies and support programs – 3, 2
Diversified employment – 3, 1
Economic development programs – 2, 1
Quota system – 2, 2
Heavy industry – 2, 1
Job training – 1, 4
Bilingualism – 2, 0
Exploitation of natural resources – 1, 1
Business associations, chambers of commerce – 1, 0
Proximity of urban centres – 0, 0
Geographical location – 0, 0
Savings and credit cooperatives – 0, 0

Services

Education and training – 17, 12
Information services (newspapers, etc.) – 3, 0
Waste management – 2, 2
Services in support of economic development – 2, 2
Social services (daycare, paratransit, accommodation, foster homes, etc., etc.) – 3, 0

Social

Francophone community and its organizations – 19, 4
Health and hospitals – 10, 7
Volunteerism – 4, 2
Family – 3, 1
Networking – 3, 0
Safe community – 2, 0
Cooperation – 2, 0
Culture and art – 1, 0
Good environment for children – 1, 0
Recreation and sports – 1, 0
Social and community activities – 0, 0
Religion, church, values – 0, 0

Natural

Water – 15, 11
Water supply pipelines, sewers and drainage – 13, 13
Soil, air, wetlands – 8, 3
Trees – 5, 1
Fauna and flora – 4, 2
Climate – 4, 1
Cultivated plants – 2, 0
Open spaces – 1, 0
Landscapes – 1, 0
Parks – 0, 0
Hiking trails – 0, 0
Mines and quarries – 0, 0

Appendix D: Key Rural Assets Discussed in Small Working Groups: Definitions/Resources/Threats

Through a voting process, participants were asked to identify five key rural assets that they, as individuals, valued most from the list of key rural assets identified by the large-group asset voting process.

Education and Training

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

Education and training appeared in the top five individual rural asset ranking for 55% of the participants.

Large-group Asset Valuing

In the initial large-group session, **Education and Training** were combined and identified as the most significant asset in the “services” asset bundle.

Participants gave “Education and Training” a total of 29 votes:

- 17 blue (valued)
- 12 red (threatened).

Definition of “Education and Training”

Participants identified the following meanings associated with “education and training”:

- Development of skills, knowledge, problem-solving, upgrading, etc.
- Continuous learning from pre-school to university in French
- Practical training, work placements

Resources Sustaining “Education and Training”

- Updating mission of community colleges to focus on community training, needs and expectations
- Reviewing curriculum and keeping it up-to-date
- Repatriating people “floating” between the two systems

Threats to “Education and Training”

- Competition between school systems: public, Catholic, Francophone, Anglophone
- Lack of access to professional training services in French
- Curriculum management

Water

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

Water appeared in the top five individual rural assets ranking for 45% of the participants.

Large-group Asset Valuing

In the initial large-group session, Water was identified as the most significant asset in the “natural” asset bundle.

Participants gave “water” a total of 52 votes:

- 28 blue (valued)
- 24 red (threatened).

Definition of “Water”

Participants identified the following meanings associated with “water”:

- Drinking water
- Necessary for life
- Water courses: rivers, lakes, etc.
- Water system
- Drainage

Resources Sustaining “Water”

- Laws: prohibiting use of pesticides, controlled use of water, etc.
- Environmental groups: education, consultation, protection and prevention
- Innovative water purification systems

Threats to “Water”

- Poor practices / soil use / discharge, drainage, etc.
- Contamination by human activity: agriculture, navigation, urban growth, waste disposal, coliforms, toxic wastes, etc.
- Pollution
- Deregulation and transfer of responsibilities to municipalities

Health and the Francophone Community

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

Health appeared in the top five individual rural assets ranking for 33% of the participants. Sense of Community appeared in the top five individual rural assets ranking for 13% of the participants. The combined percentage for these two categories is 46%.

Large-group Asset Valuing

In the initial large-group session, **Health and the Francophone Community** were combined and identified as the most significant asset in the “social” asset bundle.

Participants gave these two assets a total of 40 votes:

The Francophone community and its organizations:

- 19 blue (valued)
- 4 red (threatened).

Health:

- 10 blue (valued)
- 7 red (threatened).

Definition of “Francophone Community and Its Organizations”

- Partnership among Francophone organizations
- Franco-Ontario flag
- French-language education
- Bilingualism; openness to globalization

Definition of “Health”

- Telemedicine
- Francophone health centre

Threats to “Francophone Community and Its Organizations”

- Provincial government services in English
- Transportation from work to home: drivers, etc. speak English
- Assimilation
- Law of least effort
- Use of volunteers not recognized
- Under-funded organizations
- Lack of French-language service suppliers in rural Ontario

Threats to “Health”

- Accessibility in French
- Brain drain, young people leaving, etc.

Agriculture

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

Agriculture appeared in the top five individual rural assets ranking for 40% of the participants.

Large-group Asset Valuing

In the initial large-group session, **Agriculture** was identified as the most significant asset in the “economic” asset bundle.

Participants gave “agriculture” a total of 24 votes:

- 17 blue (valued)
- 7 red (threatened).

Definition of “Agriculture”

Participants identified the following meanings associated with “agriculture”:

- Regional engine of economic growth
- Diversification: horticulture, agri-food, etc.
- Soil quality
- Climate
- Agritourism: agritours, bison, etc.
- Agriculture in support of the development of other businesses
- Job creation
- Quotas

Resources Sustaining “Agriculture”

- Physical resources: soil, water, energy, environment, air, etc.
- Human resources
- Farm and professional organizations
- Collège d’Alfred for know-how
- Regulations, policies and laws
- Producers – innovation and expertise

Threats to “Agriculture”

- Negative effects of globalization, inequity
- No processing of farm products
- Reduced support and government services
- Profitability of farm businesses, low profit margin
- Reduced number of farms
- Challenge of passing farms on to the next generation
- Diseases
- Urban/rural distance and misunderstanding

SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications

Individual Rural Asset Ranking

Telecommunications appeared in the top five individual rural assets ranking for 13% of the participants. Human Resources appeared for 32% of the participants. The combined categories represent 45% of the participants ranking these assets in the top five.

Large-group Asset Valuing

In the initial large-group session, **SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications** were identified as important assets in the “economic” and “built” asset bundles.

Participants gave these assets a total of 61 votes:

SMEs, M-Es and Family Businesses (“Economic”):

- 10 blue (valued)
- 6 red (threatened)

Telecommunications (“Built”):

- 13 blue (valued)
- 8 red (threatened)

Human Resources (“Economic”):

- 16 blue (valued)
- 8 red (threatened).

Definition of “Economy”

Participants identified the following meanings associated with “economy”:

- Job creation
- Improved quality of life
- Socio-economic stimulation
- End of isolation
- Networking
- Development tool
- Preservation of farms

Resources Sustaining “SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications”

SMEs, M-Es:

- Financial capital
- Human capital
- Leadership – community support

Human Resources:

- Education and training
- Employment services: government, private and public
- Growing population and labour force

Telecommunications:

- High demand, high level of need
- Available resources, power lines, poles
- Obvious applications

Threats to “SMEs, M-Es, Human Resources and Telecommunications”**SMEs, M-Es:**

- Generational continuity
- Major competition from big chains
- Globalization
- Responsibilities: laws, policies, regulations, taxation, etc.

Human Resources:

- Need for training in the workplace
- Lack of communication between farming, high tech and manufacturing sectors
- Incompatibilities among training, the rural economy and employment

Telecommunications:

- Marginalization of rural areas; old equipment
- Aggregation of resources
- Businesses paralysed for lack of efficient telecommunications or relocation

